

## Time use surveys in developing countries

Conventional measures of productive activity focus on paid economic activity. But for a comprehensive picture of work and employment, especially the activities performed by women, it is essential to measure subsistence agriculture and other unpaid productive activities as well as unpaid housework. Time use surveys provide a unique means to collect data on such activities.

Until recently time use data were not included in the data collection programmes of developing countries' national statistical offices. Most time use studies in these countries were case studies of one or a few localities and did not cover a 24-hour day.

Following the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women (held in Beijing in 1995), however, at least 24 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean have begun work on national time use surveys. Although geographically, economically and culturally diverse, all these countries have come to consider national time use surveys an important statistical tool for measuring and valuing women's and men's paid and unpaid work and for increasing the visibility of women's work both at home and in the labour

market. Some of the surveys (such as those in Benin, Chad, India and Oman and the pilot studies in Nigeria and South Africa) also aim to improve the collection of data on women's economic activities, especially in the informal sector. In India the objectives include using the data for skills training and for designing poverty eradication programmes.

A joint project of the United Nations Statistics Division, the United Nations Development Programme and Canada's International Development Research Centre provided technical assistance to many of these countries. The project also studied methods and classifications used in national time use surveys to determine which procedures are suitable for collecting time use data in developing countries. And the United Nations Statistics Division is developing a technical guide on data collection methods and a classification of time use statistics that can be adapted to both developing and industrial countries. The Statistics Division will also compile data from the studies conducted in developing countries since 1995. These data should be available for *Human Development Report 2002*.